

CPYRIGHT

FOIAb3b

DONOVAN SAYS HE ALONE RAN CAPTIVE DEAL

Denies Robert Kennedy Was In Charge Of Cuba Operation

Washington, Dec. 27 (AP) — The Washington Star quoted James B. Donovan today as saying he alone — not Robert F. Kennedy, Attorney General — had charge of the operation that brought 1,113 Bay of Pigs prisoners back to the United States.

In fact, Donovan implied, he could have completed the job without Kennedy's participation if it were not for the Cuban missile crisis last October.

Counsel For Committee

"I have enormous respect for the Attorney General," Donovan told the Star, "but it is absolutely and unqualifiedly so that the policy and negotiations were entrusted to me."

Donovan, a New York lawyer, is counsel for the Cuban Families Committee that negotiated the exchange of the Cuban prisoners for \$53,000,000 worth of drugs, food, and equipment.

Government sources had reported previously that Attorney General Kennedy had directed a team of Government officials who helped manage the massive operation.

Edwin Guthman, Kennedy's information officer, has said that the Justice Department served as headquarters for the operation. Government officials and private lawyers phoned the American Red Cross, drug companies, transportation agencies, and labor unions and asked them to help Donovan's committee complete the deal with Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro.

Private Groups

In the last two weeks, Guthman said, 200 representatives of private groups came to Washington to talk with members of the team at the Justice Department and in most cases discussed the matter with Attorney General Kennedy.

The Star reached Donovan today by telephone in a cottage at Lake Placid, N.Y., where he is resting after his long negotiations with Castro.

Donovan described as absurd some reports that Attorney General Kennedy, the President's brother, had "masterminded" the deal.

"We did have the cooperation of the authorities," Donovan said. "We could never have succeeded without them."

"Purely Responsible"

"But it was not the Government or the Attorney General who was responsible for dealing with the drug companies who supplied what Castro wanted in exchange for the prisoners."

"I was purely responsible for this," Donovan said.

He said he first had contacted the heads of two large drugs companies—both old friends of his. The original plan, Donovan continued, was to have the two companies handle the entire deal.

"They could have done it until the October crisis came up," Donovan said, referring to President Kennedy's blockade of ships bringing Soviet offensive weapons to Cuba.

Asked For Help

Three weeks ago, the committee set a goal of trying to get the men out by Christmas. Donovan said there wasn't time for just two companies to do the job.

Donovan said he then came to Washington and asked for help from the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association, which represents 200 drug companies.

"They agreed to cooperate but required assurances, understandably, that the exchange would be legal as well as in the national interest," Donovan told the Star.

"The Attorney General did see two representatives of the companies and did give them the assurances they wanted."

CPYRIGHT